

# NCBM OUTREACH



Issue No. 51

Permit No. PP. 7594/7/2008

April – June 2008

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**A quarterly  
publication of NCBM**

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OF ANY BLIND  
PERSON NEEDING  
REGISTRATION FOR  
EDUCATION OR  
REHABILITATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT US  
IMMEDIATELY

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Te: 03-2272 4959

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 1. MARRIAGE COUNSELLING WORKSHOP FOR THE BLIND

Ample notice is being given regarding a marriage counselling workshop which will be held from November 1 – 2, 2008 (Saturday and Sunday) at the MAB hall. Courting couples and newly-weds (within five years of marriage) are warmly invited to take part. Meals and Braille documents will be provided. Places are limited to 25 couples (or 50 persons) only.

*To register, please contact  
Godfrey Ooi at Tel. 22722677  
ext. 127.*

“The one thing in the  
world, of value, is  
the active soul.”

Ralph Waldo

Emerson

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in “The NCBM Outreach”. However, please note that it would be very helpful to the Editor if such contributions could be submitted either on diskette or on single-sided Braille pages to facilitate editing.

For details of payments, please see the last page.

“Give me the  
luxuries of life and  
I will willingly  
do without the  
necessities.”

Frank Lloyd

Wright

## SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body. Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

Donations should be made in the name of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. Address:

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## PROF. DATUK DR. ISMAIL MD. SALLEH: THE VOICE OF THE DISABLED

*Editor's Note: This article is taken from Sunday Star of December 23, 2007 after Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Md. Salleh was sworn in as the first disabled senator in Malaysia. Here is the story:*

Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Md. Salleh made history when he became the first disabled person to become a Senator at the Dewan Negara last week.

Surprised, but not too surprised, Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail Md. Salleh shared how he felt when he was notified of his appointment as a Senator at the Dewan Negara.

The talk of having a senator to represent the disabled had been circulating for many years now. "In fact, I have been one of its strong advocates," he said, adding that the hints had been growing so strong in the last few months that he felt if it did not happen, the whole disabled community would have been devastated.

Speculation was put to rest when the blind father of six was sworn in last Tuesday, taking the oath before Dewan Negara President, Tan Sri Dr. Abdul Halim Pawanteh.

He said he had never dreamt of becoming a parliamentarian, but now that he has been appointed as one, he promises to rise to the challenge.

"I am happy to provide a voice in Parliament that can advocate for the issues and welfare of the disabled. This will be a platform for me to PROPOSE SUGGESTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE DISABLED."

He added that the closest he had ever aspired to becoming a parliamentarian was his ambition to be a lawyer when he was a child. "When I was younger, I really wanted to become a lawyer because my idols, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Lee Kuan Yew and Tun Abdul Razak, all had a legal background and I wanted to emulate them," he recalled.

Economics became his chosen field instead, but his knowledge has made him a regular consultant for the government. This, he says, has given him confidence in taking up his new role.

Acknowledging how under-represented the disabled are at the decision-making level, Dr. Ismail is hopeful that his timely appointment will signify a breakthrough. "It is still difficult for the disabled to convince other people of their capabilities. To break through, we need to showcase our capabilities and prove to the public that we can do it. I am only one person in the big picture but this opportunity gives me the chance to lead the way for change to improve the welfare of the disabled," he vowed.

This is shared by many of his peers in the disabled community. Chong Tuck Meng, founder and President of Perwira K9, an NGO for the disabled, said, "When I heard of his appointment, I was doubtful because Datuk Dr. Ismail is an academic; so can he do the work of a senator? Another fact is that the disabled community is so diverse; I was, therefore, worried whether he would leave some of us behind."

But Chong quickly changed his mind after meeting Dr. Ismail who had promised to hold a congress to get feedback from the different disabled groups.

A respected academic and economist, Dr. Ismail has definitely more than proved his credentials. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the State University of New York in 1973, and received his Master of Science (economics) from the University of Illinois in 1974, before obtaining his Ph.D. from the same university in 1977.

As President of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), he also sits on various committees and working groups on the local and international level. He is also Vice Chancellor of the International University College of Technology Twintech, the National Economic Consultative Council Chief Rapporteur, member of the National Implementation Task Force in the Prime Minister's Department, and Chairman of the East Asia International Council for the Education of the Visually Impaired.

In 2001 he was awarded the Doctor of Literature from the Irish

International University of the European Union in recognition of his work and contributions to the country and to the international community.

Born in Kelantan, Dr. Ismail has been totally blind since the age of thirteen. However, his condition only helped to propel him further, according to his friends, acquaintances and colleagues.

And with that challenging spirit, Dr. Ismail foresees no problem in going about his duties in Parliament. "I will need some time to familiarise myself with the Parliament building and I need to translate the documents into Braille either by myself or with the help of the Parliamentary Secretariat. I would need a room for my Braille embosser in order to facilitate the process."

Dewan Negara Secretary, Datuk Zamani Sulaiman, gives his assurance that they will do everything to assist Dr. Ismail.

Focussing on the task ahead, Dr. Ismail continued, "I believe that we have made significant progress in making Malaysia disabled-friendly but there is much more to be done."

A big challenge he hopes to address is to get more of the disabled in Malaysia to be registered with the authorities. "People are still marginalised and the number of those who have obtained assistance remains small. We need to examine the crux of the problem so that plans can be made to provide the necessary facilities to the disabled."

He attributes the problem to

poverty and lack of access. "Many are not getting the kind of help or information they need because they are poor or living in remote areas," he emphasised.

Dr. Ismail lamented the lack of public awareness about the potential and ability of the disabled, particularly in employment. "Many disabled persons have the opportunity to get higher education now but job opportunities are still low. It is tragic when the disabled have been educated but cannot obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications."

"We need to take some protective measures to encourage employment of the disabled. I am not talking about implementing quotas but rather about changing the mindset of employers to provide job opportunities and a disabled-friendly environment."

Hence, he strongly supports the government's recent move to table the Persons with Disabilities Bill and its pledges to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The bill seeks to provide for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and well-being of persons with disabilities and the creation of a National Council for Persons with Disabilities.

Signing of the international convention by the government, says Dr. Ismail, would signify a very important commitment by the authorities concerning the welfare of the disabled.

Optimistic for the future, Dr. Ismail is rearing to start on his new

job. “This new responsibility will change my lifestyle but I am glad of the opportunity to contribute to the community. I have been lucky to get so much support from society when I was building my life. Now it is my turn to give back.”

# MOTHER, WE LOVE YOU



*Editor’s Note: In the following article, Wong Kow (totally blind) does something a little*

*different from his usual musings in “A Point to Ponder”. As he expresses deep appreciation for the love and sacrifices of his mother in celebration of Mother’s Day, he also reflects on how his mother has reached the age of 101 with her faculties still intact.*

*If you want to find out the secret, please read on:*

journeying from Kuala Lumpur at around 8 a.m. Mother would then estimate the approximate time of our arrival. Then she would be sitting at the living room near the main door to wait for us patiently. Even at the age of 101, she would immediately stand and walk towards us upon seeing our approaching car. Knowing that I am visually impaired, she would lead me to the guest-room which she had prepared for me to stay (with the help of my sister-in-law under mother’s supervision). Many a time she would even stretch out her hands with the intention of carrying my luggage. Probably, she still thinks of her children as still being small boys and girls, forgetting that she herself is already a centenarian!

During their late twenties, my parents arrived from China to the then Malaya in 1934, bringing along my two elder brothers who had been born in China. Another six children were born over the next sixteen years, making a big family of ten (with parents and eight children). While my father was busy working to make ends meet, mother would plan our lives as she dealt with matters pertaining to housing, food, clothing, schooling, etc.

I was born in the Cameron Highlands and spent most of my childhood years there. During the Japanese occupation and the Malayan emergency period thereafter, education was a luxury for most of the poor families like ours, especially in the Cameron

At the age of 101 (one hundred and one), my mother is still capable of taking care of herself.

My parents had been living with my second brother and sister-in-law in Sungai Bakap, Seberang Perai, for the most part of the last 40 years. Then my father passed away at the age of 98 in 2003.

A few of my brothers and I myself raised our families in Kuala Lumpur for the past few decades because of work. However, we used to visit mother for a family reunion several times a year.

As a practice, I would usually inform mother of the exact date that I would be going home to see her. We would habitually travel by car and we would normally start

Always bear in  
mind that your own  
resolution to succeed  
is more important  
than any one thing.

**Abraham Lincoln**

**16th president of US**

**(1809 - 1865)**

Highlands (which was a remote region at the time).

The nearby police station and the Chinese primary school had become a strategic point for the fight against the communists. Thus, most of the class-rooms were occupied by soldiers who were practising to shoot and to use other weapons for almost half of the school year. There was no place for us to study in safety and security and we often faced great danger and inevitable interruptions. My parents endured the tough times with us while at the same time they had to deal with the usual problems of bread and butter.

Mother had a more comfortable time in her late forties and subsequent years after we moved to live in the state of Penang. My father and two of my elder brothers managed to find more steady jobs while the younger ones (including me) were enjoying better opportunities to continue with our education.

All went well until I went to college. Without any symptoms showing, I suddenly developed some eye trouble and an immediate operation was required. I had to be hospitalised for a **complete rest in bed** (CRIB I used to think) and this lasted for two months. Needless to say, mother suffered more than me during this crucial period; she would spend two-hour trips daily commuting between house and hospital in order to accompany and console me for two to three hours at my bedside. She constantly prayed that I would gain speedy recovery of my eyesight.

However, there were no dramatic results after my operation and I was not able to see very well. Unwilling to accept my blindness, I continued to seek treatment and it did not matter whether it was traditional, Chinese or western medicine. This was a heavy toll on the entire family, and especially burdensome for mother.

After struggling for several years, I was able to retain some partial sight; I finally accepted my blindness and decided to go for training at the Gurney Training Centre. My parents and other family members were extremely happy when they learned that I had completed a course and had secured a job.

From age 65 to 90, my parents spent much time travelling between Penang, Kuala Lumpur and East Malaysia. Most of the family remained in Penang while I was in Kuala Lumpur and my two younger brothers were working in East Malaysia. Mother would help with family chores wherever she stayed while father would buy the newspaper and read to her some of the exciting news or keep her informed of the happenings from here and there.

Mother had not received any education as a child but she managed to learn some simple Chinese texts during the Bible knowledge and prayer sessions. Influenced by her own parents and brothers during her early childhood, she somehow became quite “philosophical” in her outlook. She often instilled us with such ideas as “honesty is the best policy” and “don’t do to others if you do not wish them to do the same to you”.

Despite her great age, she is still physically and mentally alert and her memory is excellent. Most of all, I admire her for the mental calculation skills that she still retains. Whenever we had our food in a coffee-shop or hawker stall, mother would often be the first one to tell us the exact amount for payment of the bill while other family members would be digging out the calculator.

If readers were to ask me to reveal the secret of her longevity, my reply would be that there is nothing in particular. She works well and she eats moderately of the food prepared and served in the usual Chinese family. Perhaps her genuine care for family members, neighbours, relatives and friends kept her busy so that she never had time to be lonely. In fact, she had won the hearts of many people simply by demonstrating her faith and sincerity towards anyone who got in touch with her.

In summary, my observation is that because of mother’s happy acceptance of the bad and good times in her life, she has always been able to maintain a constant calmness in her life. “A thanksgiving heart” and “peace of mind” are frequently the words that I hear in her prayers. Probably, these could be the contributory factors for her longevity in life.

# COMPLEMENTING EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN REALISING THE GOALS OF THE MALAYSIAN EDUCATION POLICY

## Part II



*Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the January –March 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The second part of the article continues as follows:*

### **4.3 RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, INTEGRATED PROGRAMMES AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

#### **(a) Resource Allocation**

All the various kinds of education programmes have their role to play in providing education for the blind. In fact, all the different systems should be allowed to exist so that blind students will have choices for the programme that best suits their needs. This means that adequate attention should be given to all the programmes in terms of resource allocation for development and promotion.

#### **b) The Multi-handicapped and "Slow" Learners**

This group of students, in particular, has been overlooked or neglected in the past. Therefore, more emphasis should be given to the development of education programmes to help blind students with additional disabilities.

#### **(c) Hostels and Resource Centres**

Regarding integrated education, we are happy to note that a number of them are still surviving since their introduction in the 1960s, especially as an attempt was made to close most of them down in the 1980s. In fact, some of these programmes have been able to produce some of the best blind students over the years.

However, to ensure that these programmes would be more effective in meeting the needs of the blind in education, we would like to suggest that greater effort should be made to provide proper hostel accommodation and well equipped resource centres for the blind students. At the same time, a good support system should be developed that would include skill enhancement and capacity-building programmes, the participation of parent support groups, and so on.

#### **(d) Inclusive Education**

In the new education philosophy of today, the integrated approach should ultimately lead to the development of inclusive education for the disabled. Inclusion means many things but an important element is the adopting of the community approach, i.e. getting the community to understand the importance of education for the blind and to enable them to take part in the process of educating the blind. The community includes not only the teachers but also the school administrators, students, parents, villagers and townsfolk.

Of course, an important part of the community would be the organisations serving the blind. Opportunities, therefore, should also be opened up to them to participate in the education process. For example, organisations such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia, should be encouraged to adopt certain schools or programmes so that attention could be focussed on meeting the needs of the blind students in particular areas of concern. In fact, I am very happy to note that steps have been taken to involve such NGOs in the education process for the blind in line with the idea of the school adoption scheme that had been mooted by NCBM.

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**(e) Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR)**

The idea of involving CBR workers in the process of education should be considered. These field-workers could be doubled up as itinerant resource teachers who would help in equipping blind students with the alternative independent skills such as Braille, cane travel and daily living techniques. This means that the network of inclusive education programmes should be developed in tandem with the network of CBR programmes in the country. The CBR workers should be trained and equipped to meet such needs.

**4.4 INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES**

Besides providing adequate resources, effort should also be made to ensure that such equipment, facilities and infrastructure are adapted or modified so that they will be rendered accessible or useful to the blind students. These include:

**(a) Education Curriculum**

The curriculum and syllabi should be aimed at meeting the needs of the blind to acquire knowledge and skills. The purpose should be to empower the students so that they will be prepared for life, i.e. they will be able to live a productive and meaningful life, after leaving school. They should become daring and confident enough to take up new challenges, especially when they are out there in the world of work.

Facilities and resources required include specialist and resource

teachers, the latest adaptive equipment, Braille books and tactile aids, a conducive environment such as a practical teacher-pupil ratio, an effective support system (with library, Braille production unit, rehabilitation training, counselling, and barrier-free streets and buildings).

**(b) Computerisation of Schools**

With the computerisation of the general school system, the blind may be excluded unintentionally. However, the issue of the digital divide could be easily overcome by making available adaptive computer technology and equipment to the blind with properly trained teachers to impart the knowledge and skills to them.

Such adaptive equipment should be purchased in consultation with or procured from organisations serving the blind such as the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB).

**(c) Braille Textbooks**

The lack of Braille textbooks has been a constant source of worry for blind students. In view of this, more serious efforts are needed to harness and coordinate existing resources for Braille production in order to deal with this challenge. At the same time, new resources should be developed in consultation with organisations serving the blind as they have the expertise required in meeting such needs.

(to be continued)

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Live neither in the  
past nor in the future,  
but let each day's  
work absorb your  
entire energies, and  
satisfy your widest  
ambition.

**Sir William Osler,**

**to his students -**

**British physician**

**(1849 - 1919)**

# SHELTERED WORKSHOP FOR THE BLIND

*Editor's Note: Dr. Tan Tok Shiong (totally blind) is lecturing in economics at the University of Malaya. He would like to share with readers his views concerning the sheltered workshop for the blind.*

*Here is what he says:*

## THE PROBLEM

Many of the blind are secluded from the world and they merely face the four walls every day of their lives. Usually, they are elderly, unmarried and have retired from work. Some of these cases can be found in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur but there are certainly many more of such cases outside the Brickfields area. What can be done to help this target group of blind persons?

## OBJECTIVES

An important objective of the sheltered workshop is to improve the standard of living of this target group. Thus, the sheltered workshop should function both as a production and community centre for the blind. The workshop will produce various suitable products and the production will generate some income for the participants. When no production takes place in the workshop, it will function as a gathering place for the target group.

In order to attract participants, the sheltered workshop should be

easily accessible, comfortable and with certain additional benefits such as a subsidised lunch.

## CURRENT FACILITIES

Currently, the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) operates a Senior Citizens' Club for the elderly blind. Two medium-sized rooms located on the first floor of Kompleks MAB are used as the Elderly Blind Centre. The Centre is kept open particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays when one of the elderly blind members is on duty. The Club is active and often organises activities such as indoor games, sing-along sessions, gatherings and subsidised trips to various destinations.

MAB is also currently running a letter-folding workshop to provide temporary employment for the blind (mainly the elderly blind and the deaf-blind). The workers perform the task of inserting appeal letters into envelopes. A person working eight hours per day can earn an average of RM20 per day. The workers are also given a lunch allowance of RM3 per day.

The idea of a sheltered workshop is similar to the Elderly Blind Club and the letter-folding workshop put together. However, it would be an extended version. The workshop will be open six days a week and more people will be employed to help produce more products.

## THE MECHANISM

It is proposed that the sheltered workshop will operate similarly as the Senior Citizens' Club. However, membership of the Club will include not only the elderly blind but also the deaf-blind, and other blind persons who cannot find open employment. An annual membership fee of RM5 will be charged. The chairman and a committee will be elected by the members.

It is proposed that the temporary employment programme be moved to the sheltered workshop. More space will be available for the target group to carry out letter-folding and other income-generating activities. The Elderly Blind Centre could be used as the clubhouse for the target group.

## A COMMERCIAL SCALE WORKSHOP

For the sheltered workshop to be commercially viable, it needs to be competitive and privately run. The unit should be able to make a profit or at least be self-sustaining. The entity must be well run, the work-force disciplined, and be headed by a leader who has imagination and a great driving force. Minimum expenditure must be used to help the largest number of blind persons so that the money used can produce the greatest benefits.

## WELFARE ASSISTANCE

Members of the workshop could take advantage of the employment incentive allowance provided by the government. Those who become blind due to industrial accidents are eligible for the SOCSO allowance. MAB could consider a certain amount of pocket money which used to be the practice in the Kinta Valley workshop.

## LIST OF PRODUCTS

Besides letter-folding, other products that could be assembled include ball-point pens, paper flowers, children's toys, key-chains, rattan coin-boxes, and white canes.

The two products currently being produced at the Gurney Training Centre, i.e. the nylon-string woven stool and the collapsible table, could be included. The collapsible table is meant for Koran reading but it could also be used for a laptop computer. Using rattan for the stools rather than nylon-string would be preferable; their life-span would be shorter which means that they would be more marketable ultimately. All these products have to be produced on a large scale.

It is also suggested that car-washing be introduced to the blind. To do this, two suitable car-lots have to be selected for conversion into a simple car-washing place.

## CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the sheltered workshop for the blind could be implemented soon. It will be a

great service, especially for the elderly blind, the deaf-blind and other blind persons who are in need of some definite source of income.

A decision is  
measured by the  
fact that you've  
taken new action.  
If there's no action,  
you haven't truly  
decided.

**Anthony Robbins**

The person who  
makes a success of  
living is the one who  
see his goal steadily  
and aims for it  
unswervingly. That is  
dedication.

**Cecil B. DeMille**

**(1881 - 1959)**

# REFLECTIONS ON PLANNING FOR SUCCESS



*Editor's Note: Formerly a telephone operator, Barnabas Lee has been working as a low-vision assistant at MAB since 2003. En. Lee is himself a low-vision person and he enjoys spending his spare time reading books on professionalism and how to plan for success.*

*He would now like to share with readers some of the points that he has gleaned from his readings. Here they are:*

In carrying out our jobs and careers or in making our plans for success,

Do we have dreams or do we have schemes?

Do we see the gains, or do we see the pain?

Do we see the potential or do we see the past?

Do we make it happen or do we just let it happen?

Do we see possibilities or do we see problems?

Do we make commitments or do we make promises?

Are we a part of the team or are we apart from the team?

Do we always have a programme or do we always have an excuse?

Do we say, "let me do it for you" or do we say, "that is not my job"?

Do we say, "I must do something" or do we say, "something must be done"?

Are we always a part of the answer or are we always a part of the problem?

Do we see an answer for every problem or do we see a problem for every answer?

Do we believe in "the win/win situation" or do we believe in "someone has to win and someone has to lose"?

Do we say, "it may be difficult but it is possible" or do we say, "it may be possible but it is too difficult"?

When a mistake is made, do we say, "I was wrong" or do we say, "it wasn't my fault"?

If one speaks or acts with a cruel mind, misery follows, as the cart follows the horse... If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows, as a shadow follows its source.

## The Dhammapada

# THE JKM NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE DISABLED Part III



*Editor's Note: The second part of this article appeared in the January – March 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". In the third part of the article, the writer continues the discussion on the issues that were raised at the workshop.*

*He continues:*

## 5.6 CAPACITY-BUILDING SKILLS

It was realised that capacity-building programmes actually have the same objectives as rehabilitation and compensatory skills programmes. The main aim of all these programmes is to equip the disabled with skills in order to compensate for what they lack or to cater for their needs arising from their particular disabilities. It was noted that traditionally, rehabilitation and compensatory programmes were usually attached to a school, a home or a vocational training centre. As for "capacity-building" programmes (a relatively new term or concept in the disability field), they are usually applied to welfare programmes which may

take the needs of the disabled into account in the wider context. In the Malaysian Association for the Blind, for example, its rehabilitation services constitute an important part of the vocational training programmes at its two vocational centres known as the Gurney Training Centre and the Taman Harapan Agricultural Training Centre. On the other hand, the MAB also runs capacity-building schemes such as the educational assistance, grant assistance and executive trainee schemes which are not directly attached to any residential or institutional programmes.

## 5.7 MUSIC EDUCATION

It was noted that in spite of many disabled persons having proven their capabilities in developing their own musical talents, disabled musicians have not been given the recognition that they deserve and they lack the opportunities to gain the necessary qualifications for proper recognition. It was felt that much more attention and effort were needed to help identify and direct potential disabled musicians to proper training programmes in order to hone and develop their musical talents and to have their achievements properly certified. In addition, disabled musicians should be adequately supported by making available facilities such as music rooms, musical instruments and other equipment for practices,

production rooms for recording projects, and financial assistance for marketing and promotional opportunities.

## 5.8 PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

The view was expressed that there should have been much more representation and greater involvement by the private sector. Such exposure would have been very useful in bringing about better understanding of disability issues among the private corporations. This would then enable them to respond more positively to the needs of the disabled and their right to full participation and equal opportunities. The private sector would then be better able to help in implementing government provisions, policies and programmes related to the disabled, particularly with regards to employment opportunities.

## 5.9 SIGN-LANGUAGE AND FINGER-BRAILLE COMMUNICATION

The deaf have been using sign-language as a means of communication for many years. Finger-Braille, however, is a relatively unknown method of communication for the deaf-blind, especially in Malaysia.

There was the feeling that just as sign-language for the deaf has been

recognised by the Government, hopes were expressed that finger-Braille communication may also be recognised eventually. In fact, a start has already been made to use finger-Braille as a tool of communication and education in the deaf-blind programme at St. Nicholas Home in Penang. Ultimately, as many more deaf-blind persons gain access to education, finger-Braille communication will need to be extended to the workplace where the deaf-blind will be seeking for employment opportunities; then not only the deaf-blind but those who are not deaf-blind as well will need to use finger-Braille as a tool for social communication.

should fall back on Braille for the purpose of accessibility to or in certain buildings and facilities. The museum would be a very good case in point.

In this connection, it was agreed that Braille and tactile signage should be regarded as an important skill to be acquired in the rehabilitation programme for the blind. More attention would be needed in equipping the blind with such knowledge and skills. For example, it would be most helpful to the blind if they have the ability to recognise print letters and numbers easily as well as objects of all kinds in embossed form.

(to be continued)

**5.10 TACTILE SIGNAGE**

With regards to access to public facilities, Braille signage is being used in certain facilities to help the blind such as the “up and down” signs outside lifts. It was suggested that in many cases, it may be preferable to use tactile signage which would be cheaper and a less complicated form for the public to understand. Tactile signage would also fit in well with the idea of inclusive or universal design.

For the toilets, for example, it may be more practical to use “male” and “female” symbols which are embossed rather than Braille. These signs could be easily recognised not only by the blind but also by the general public. Concerning the lifts, it may be more practical to use the “up arrow” and “down arrow” symbols instead of Braille. However, where there is no possibility of using tactile signage, then the design planners

We need men who  
can dream of things  
that never were.  
**John F. Kennedy**  
**35th president of**  
**US 1961-1963**  
**(1917 - 1963)**

In the attitude of  
silence the soul finds  
the path in a clearer  
light, and what is  
elusive and deceptive  
resolves itself into  
crystal clearness.  
Our life is a long and  
arduous quest after  
Truth.  
**Mahatma Gandhi**  
**Indian leader**  
**(1869 - 1948)**

# THE DISABILITY ACT OF MALAYSIA FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## Part II

*Editor's Note: The first part of this article appeared in the January – March 2008 issue of "The NCBM Outreach". The second part continues:*

### **4. EDUCATION**

#### **4.1 The Right to Education**

The importance of education to children with disabilities cannot be gainsaid; the denial of access to education at the onset perpetuates the vicious cycle. Children with disabilities who fail to receive education at the early stages will lose the opportunity for further development because of the lack of access to vocational training, employment, income generation, and business advancement, thereby forfeiting economic and social independence.

4.2 The right to education is embodied in a varied number of international instruments. Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has direct relevance to Malaysia. It affirms the obligation to "ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the 'disabled' child's active participation in the community". This includes the disabled child's "effective access to and receipt of education, training, health care services, preparation for employment, and recreation opportunities in a manner

conducive to the child's achieving the fullest social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development".

#### **4.3 INTEGRATED AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Provision should be made for free education until the age of 18 years. It should also address the issue concerning the training of teachers, new teaching methods, conducive environment and alternative learning strategies. It should guarantee the availability of necessary equipment and support in the classroom, including the obligation of educational institutions to take measures to modify physical barriers and promote the use of alternative and augmentative communication modes, including the right of a deaf or hearing impaired child to receive education through sign language.

The provision of education should be extended to the youth and adults with disabilities.

### **5. EMPLOYMENT**

5.1 As some 500 million persons with disabilities have the capacity to contribute to national development in the Asian and Pacific region, it is timely that society recognises the capacity

of persons with disabilities in Malaysia to contribute to the development of the nation. According to the United Nations, the unemployment rate among the disabled in most countries remains at a very high level; PWD's who are employed are mostly engaged in low-paying jobs.

The policy of at least 1% employment for the disabled in the public and private sectors should be re-emphasised. Incentives should be introduced for those employing more than 1% of disabled persons in the workforce.

#### **5.2 THE RIGHT TO DECENT WORK**

In the Biwako Millennium framework for action (BMFA), the concept of the right to decent work is expanded upon. This implies "productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity" with the right to choose the type of employment according to one's abilities. Consideration should be given to continued education, vocational training, business development, specialised support services such as assistive devices and job modifications.

### **6. REHABILITATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

6.1 Provisions should be made

concerning rehabilitation, vocational training, career guidance, job placement, employment opportunities and other related services. The objective should be to enable PWD's to secure, retain and advance in employment.

Such services should be made available to all categories of PWD's with the view to:

- (a) Promoting employment opportunities for PWD's in the open labour market and specifically "to enable a disabled person to secure, retain and advance in suitable employment and to further such persons' integration or re-integration into society".
- (b) "Prepare a person with disability when and where possible for the resumption of a previous activity, or for the most suitable alternative gainful activity, taking into consideration aptitudes and capacity".

## **6.2 ADAPTATIONS**

The third element of the right to decent work is the responsibility of employers to ensure that places of work are accessible to the disabled. The proposed act should place a legal obligation upon all employers (both in the public and private sectors) to make reasonable adjustments or adaptations to workplaces, job functions and design, tools, machinery and work structure in order to facilitate the training and employment of PWD's.

(to be continued)

# **NEWS FROM THE MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND**

## **DAVID LEE STUDIES MUSIC IN AUSTRALIA**

In 2007 David Lee was given a scholarship loan from MAB to pursue his studies in Australia. In February, David, aged 24, left for the University of Adelaide where he studied for the A-level examination. He did very well and is now undergoing a degree course in music. The course is largely practical but he still needs to read Braille music.

Fortunately, the Royal Society for the Blind (RSB) converts his sheet music into Braille which he reads, memorizes and then plays. RSB is also helping him with computer training and use of the mobile phone talking software. They also provided him with a white cane and plenty of orientation and mobility training in his two key environments – the college where he lives, and the university grounds.

David's passion for classical music goes back to his early childhood when his parents exposed him to the piano and violin. However, because of his blindness, his parents confined him at home and they were his teachers for his primary education. Then he was sent to the SMPK Setapak to continue his secondary education. He demonstrated great determination and learned his Braille within six months. After completing the SPM examination,

he applied to the University of Adelaide and he was admitted in 2007.

## **HARMONICA PERFORMANCE BY RUDY HUNG FROM HONG KONG**

On February 20th 2008, Rudy Hung, a harmonica virtuoso from Hong Kong, gave a brief performance to the blind at Kompleks MAB. His rendition of two classical pieces on the harmonica was amazing – he could make the harmonica sound like a violin and he was able to form chords one would have thought not possible on the harmonica.

The pieces he played were Nocturne by Chopin and two of the Caprices composed by Paganini. In fact, Rudy was in Malaysia to do a studio recording of his music on the harmonica. Classical music enthusiasts would surely love to include his cd recording in their collection when it is available.

## **SENATOR PROF. DATUK DR. ISMAIL SALLEH MEETS THE DISABLED**

The senator held a meeting with the disabled self-help groups and several NGO's on Sunday, January 13th 2008 at the MAB hall in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. The objective of the meeting was for Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail bin Mohd.

Salleh to have a feel of the current issues and concerns affecting the disabled.

As a follow-up, the senator has promised to hold a much more comprehensive congress within six months. This is to allow time for interested participants to prepare some plans or policies to be presented for consideration at the congress.

In order to maintain official links with the government and at the same time making himself easily accessible to the disabled, the senator will be establishing his main office at the National Welfare Department (JKM) as well as run a small office at the Kompleks MAB.

### **FROM ABC TO PDK**

The Assistance to Blind Children (or ABC) programme of MAB was set up in 1990. When MAB moved its headquarters from Petaling Jaya to Kompleks MAB in Brickfields in 1997, the ABC programme was also transferred to Kompleks MAB.

In 2007 the National Welfare Department (JKM) granted recognition to the Brickfields ABC programme as a PDK programme. (PDK means Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti or CBR which means Community-Based Rehabilitation.)

With recognition as PDK the programme will be receiving financial assistance from the government with effect from February 2008. The assistance will be channelled through the state welfare department from the

National Welfare Department. It will include the following:

RM150 monthly pocket money for each child;

RM800 monthly allowance for each PDK instructor;

RM1,200 monthly allowance for the PDK supervisor (who must be below 45 years of age);

RM3,000 for monthly rental of premises;

RM1,000 monthly allocation for utilities;

RM30,000 annual allocation for programmes and activities.

Four new instructors (three of them low-vision persons) joined the Brickfields PDK programme in February this year. The programme is still being led by Pn. Rosnah Alimuda as head teacher and coordinator.

On the national level, the government has allocated a budget of one million ringgit for all the government-run PDK programmes throughout the country. Currently, there are 9,514 disabled persons attending the PDK programmes either run or sponsored by JKJ.

### **MAB OPEN HOUSE AND BEST BLIND STUDENT AWARDS**

The Seventh MAB Open House for the Blind was held on Saturday, January 12th 2008. About 1,500 blind persons together with their

families and friends attended the function.

The highlight of the event was the presentation of the Best Blind Student Awards for the candidates who sat for the 2006 public examinations. (Due to unavoidable circumstances, these awards could not be presented in 2007.)

The awards were given away by the MAB President, Senator Prof. Datuk Dr. Ismail bin Mohd. Salleh to the following:

Kong Hwei Zhen (Amanda) for the UPSR (from Sekolah Khas Sungai Kantan, Hulu Langat, Selangor); results – 5 A's; she received RM200.

Olivia Vinoba a/p David Christopher for the PMR (from SMK (P) St. George, Georgetown, Penang); results – 7 A's; she received RM300.

Syarnissa bt. Ahmad Dahuri for SPM (from SMK Hill Crest, Taman Sri Gombak, Batu Caves, Selangor); results – 7 A1's, 1 A2, 1 B3's, 3 B4's, and 1 C5; she received RM400.

Christine Tan Lee Ling for STPM (from SMK Temenggung Ibrahim (P), Batu Pahat, Johor); results – 5 A's; she received RM500.

Mohd. Shafiri bin Jusoh for a degree in Malay studies (from Universiti Malaya, Fakulti Pengajian Melayu, K.L.); results – CGPA 3.5; he received RM2,000.

+ +

**JOB PLACEMENTS FOR  
2007**

In 2007, a total of 59 blind and visually impaired persons were placed in open employment. They were as follows:

Telephonists - cum -  
Receptionists – 14

Telemarketers – 1

Computer Braillists – 1

Masseurs – 29

Kitchen Helpers – 1

Housekeeping/Laundry  
Assistants – 3

Contract Executives – 1

Assistant Welfare Officers  
– 1

Teachers – 4

Vocational Instructors – 3

Lecturers – 1

Total – 59

**HANDICRAFTS COURSE  
USING PAPER CANE**

On August 22, 2007, a team from the MAB Job Placement Unit visited the Bengkel Sri Perkasa located in Johol, Negeri Sembilan. At the workshop, the team saw how the disabled there were taught to produce various types of handicrafts using beads, rattan and paper.

The products woven from paper cane were most impressive. Old newspapers and magazine paper

were rolled up to form artificial canes which were then used to produce articles such as vases, baskets, flowers and pencil holders. The items were then shellacked so that they looked like real cane handicrafts.

MAB plans to introduce the course to the blind starting from Saturday, March 15 over a period of five weeks. The teacher is Pn. Mehboob Sulaiman.

True silence is the  
rest of the mind; it  
is to the spirit what  
sleep is to the body,  
nourishment and  
refreshment.

**William Penn**

**English religious**

**leader and colonist**

**(1644 - 1718)**

**Believe in yourself!**

**Have faith in**

**your abilities!**

**Without a humble**

**but reasonable**

**confidence in your**

**own powers you**

**cannot be successful**

**or happy**

**Norman Vincent**

**Peale (1898 - 1993)**

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong  
Assistant Executive Director  
National Council for the Blind Malaysia*

In previous issues, I have written on products such as the Book Courier and the Victor Stream Reader. Here is yet another piece of adaptive equipment which is a little more expensive - however, more money means you can accomplish more with this device.



This product is known as the ICON, developed by Level Star, another up and coming

company that would like to give the blind better accessibility on the move. While it was Level Star that manufactured the first model, the distributorship has been taken over by the American Printing House for the Blind. It is the second model that is being sold as the ICON.

The features are as follows:

**Memory** - it can store thousands of digital books and songs in the 40 gigabyte hard drive, far exceeding other PDA's for the blind and visually impaired.

**Life-changing Software Applications** - the software applications are pre-installed. You have everything you need wherever you go.

**Calendar** - all your important

appointments CAN BE STORED in one place and YOU CAN take the CALENDAR ANYWHERE WITH YOU.

**Address Book** - you will always have access to phone numbers, email and web addresses for your contacts and you can easily sync-up your address book and calendar with Microsoft Outlook®.

**Web Browser** - you can surf the Internet with ease even when you are on the go. Wireless connection and an easy-to-use web browser keeps you connected.

**Email** - being in touch never has to stop; when you are near a WiFi hotspot, you can easily send and receive email.

**Word Processor** - you can take your documents with you or write them on the road. The intuitive and user-friendly word processor works with Microsoft® and other Word compatible documents.

**Music Player** - you can have your favourite artistes in the palm of your hand with its MP3 player; thousands of songs can be stored and categorised according to artistes, titles, albums or genre.

**Pod Cast** - with the Icon, it is easy to download and listen to pod casts, or even record your own.

**Voice Recorder** - you never have to forget any details with the voice

recorder handy. The digital sound gives you a high-quality recording of lectures, personal memos, etc.

**Journal** - you can record the events of your day through your calendar or post your entries to a web blog.

**Clock** - get the time of day at the push of a button.

**Stopwatch** - when you need to time an event, you have a handy stopwatch.

**Calculator** - calculations can be made at a snap.

Empowering library options - you can take books, newspapers and periodicals with you. The library options include a **Book Player** and bookshare.

(Note: the latter is only for those residing in the U.S.A.)

Anytime Internet Access - whether you are at your desk or on the go, you can connect to the Internet through the built-in WiFi wireless connection when you are within range of a hotspot. When plugged into the Docking Station, you have Ethernet or a dial-up modem.

Wireless features - you have built-in wireless features for easy, portable Internet access and wireless headset compatibility: Bluetooth® 1.1 wireless Wi-Fi® 802.11b wireless



Prepare to live big.

Docking station available – it is engineered with a two-part design. Simply snap the Icon into the Braille or QWERTY Docking Station and you will be able to:

Take notes comfortably.

Perform full-capability word processing.

Web browse extensively.

Read and write email while you are on the go.

Well, what is the cost of this equipment? The price is US\$1,395.00 only.

Unfortunately, the pricing does not include the docking station. At the point of writing this article, such information is not available on the webpage.

For further information, please refer to <http://www.levelstar.com>

IF YOU KNOW OF  
ANY BLIND PERSON  
NEEDING REGISTRATION  
FOR EDUCATION OR  
REHABILITATION, PLEASE  
CONTACT US IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673  
03-2272 2677

## A SURVEY ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND IN MALAYSIA FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



***Editor's Note: Abdul Rahman Tang Abdullah is totally blind and he is a lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He presented a paper on "Opportunities for the Blind in Malaysia for Education and Employment" at the national conference on social problems organised by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology from November 27 – 29, 2004. Here is what he says:***

Generally, the Malaysian society is sympathetic towards the blind. However, the tendency of the general public is also to regard the blind as inferior human beings. Probably, one of the reasons for this is that the blind are usually looked upon as "welfare cases" because most matters concerning the well-being of the blind are placed under the jurisdiction of the national and state welfare departments.

Education for the blind in

Malaysia had been established before independence. It began with the St. Nicholas Primary School in Penang, a service of St. Nicholas Home which had been founded in 1926. The Princess Elizabeth Primary School for the Blind was set up in Johor Bahru in 1948. The district welfare officers were responsible for getting blind children admitted to either one of these schools. In the late 1970s, the first residential secondary school for the blind was established in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur.

In the 1960s, the "integrated programme" was introduced which enabled the blind to go to the normal schools such as the Muar High School, the Sultan Ismail College in Kota Bharu, St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur, and the Sultan Abdul Hamid College in Alor Star, Kedah.

In the 1970s, blind students were first admitted to the University of Malaya.

Then, to prepare the blind for employment, the Gurney Training Centre was set up by the National Welfare Department in 1953. It was ultimately placed under the charge of the Malaysian Association for the Blind.

In spite of these developments, nonetheless, the blind in Malaysia still do not enjoy equal opportunities in education. One of the main difficulties faced by blind students is the lack of Braille reading materials. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, only the national textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education were available. To acquire reading materials specifically designed for examination purposes, the blind students had to transcribe their own texts or have them read aloud by sighted friends.

Opportunities for the blind to enter the science stream in secondary education are hardly existent. It may be too ambitious to imagine that the Ministry of Education would consider providing comprehensive facilities so that the blind could have the option of joining the science stream.

Until 1988, no blind student had ever sat for the Shari'ah paper in the STPM examination. It was in that year when the first blind student attempted the paper as a private candidate. Unfortunately, due to the lack of Braille materials for study, this particular blind student did not perform well in the examination. Consequently, he was unable to pursue such related courses at the university level.

At the tertiary level, the success of the blind continues to be constrained by the lack of Braille reading materials. Despite these difficulties, some blind students still managed to excel not only in the arts and social sciences but also in the field of economics.

However, those who go on to post-graduate education also continue

to be plagued by the lack of access to reading materials. Currently, there is no agency, either by the government or a non-governmental organisation, which is committed in running a good support service system for the blind in tertiary education. In actual fact, a lot of the Braille reading materials could be purchased from the developed nations such as Britain, Australia and the U.S.A.

Fortunately, with the help of computer technology nowadays, the blind are able to overcome the problem of access to a certain extent. For this we are indebted to NCBM and MAB for having introduced the use of adaptive aids and equipping the blind with computer skills during the 1990s.

### **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Before the 1970s, the majority of the blind were employed as telephone operators and stenographers. Many of them became masseurs after massage was introduced in the 1970s. Those with low vision even took up occupations such as lift and parking attendants, gardeners, and factory or general workers.

Most of the blind graduates are employed as civil servants or teachers. Only a very small number have obtained the highly prestigious jobs such as university lecturers or as managers or trainers in the private sector.

Actually, the problem of unemployment for the blind was most acute in the 1990s. Telephone operating, for instance, was becoming obsolete

because of advancements in computer technology. In fact, the stenographers have become irrelevant and they needed to be equipped with computer skills. The blind graduates had no careers because the teaching profession was closed to them. In 1992 there were only six blind teachers employed by the Ministry of Education.

Fortunately, in 1998 the Ministry of Education agreed to allow the blind to join the teaching profession. This made it possible for the blind graduates who had long been unemployed to enter the teacher-training institutions and colleges. Many of the telephone operators and stenographers resigned from the public sector in order to undergo the diploma course in teaching. NCBM, of course, had played a very important role in getting the doors to teacher-training opened to the blind since 1998.

Nevertheless, unemployment is still a great problem facing the blind. Many of them are still unable to find suitable jobs after leaving the Gurney Training Centre. As a result, many of them have turned to begging and we can see a lot of them in Kuala Lumpur. Many of the blind beggars have SPM qualifications but some blind graduates have also resorted to this activity.

There are many reasons why employment opportunities for the blind are lacking. They include the following:

#### **1. Limited Scope in Vocational Training**

Most of the blind are only trained

to be telephone operators. They are not equipped with skills to take up other office occupations such as secretaries or book-keepers. They lack the knowledge and training that would enable them to seek all sorts of employment as machine operators, factory workers or business entrepreneurs.

**2. Lack of Progress in current vocational training programmes**

Little progress has been made in the vocational training programmes at the Gurney Training Centre and Taman Harapan. The only viable occupation for the blind these days is massage. Much more, however, needs to be done to have the massage course and other courses upgraded.

**3. Increasing Incidence of Blindness Among the Adults**

There is an increasing number of adults who become blind while in the prime of their careers. When this happens, they are usually forced to retire from their jobs way before their retirement age. It is crucial for such persons to be able to obtain the necessary adjustment training that would enable them to go back to their former professions or to take up other suitable careers.

**4. Public Misperception Regarding the Abilities of the Blind**

A good example of this misperception can be seen in the Ministry of Education which is often reluctant to employ blind teachers. Even today there are

teachers who do not know Braille but teaching the blind while qualified blind teachers are denied such opportunities. There is little recognition that the advanced computer technology, the blind in the teaching profession and other careers are now able to carry out their job functions quite effectively.

**5. Lack of Awareness Among the Blind Themselves Regarding Their Potential Abilities**

The blind themselves need to be pro-active in convincing society of their potential abilities. They must be willing to acquire knowledge and skills that would make them flexible and marketable for employment. They must be able to create or project a positive image of the blind through their appearance, behaviour, speech and so on.

**CONCLUSION**

The social problems and under-achievement of the blind should be regarded as a national concern. Both the government agencies and non-governmental organisations need to play a more active role in finding ways to make the blind into a more progressive and productive community.

What the blind are facing now is a result of the stagnation and limited efforts being made by the relevant authorities to overcome the situation. New opportunities must be created by opening up more new courses so that a wider range of employment options will become available to the blind.

Finally, the blind themselves must

adopt a positive and progressive attitude. They should not wait for others to find solutions to their problems. They need to take matters into their own hands and take their own affirmative actions to overcome the challenges facing them.

<p>IF YOU KNOW OF</p> <p>ANY BLIND PERSON</p> <p>NEEDING REGISTRATION</p> <p>FOR EDUCATION OR</p> <p>REHABILITATION, PLEASE</p> <p>CONTACT US IMMEDIATELY</p> <p>NCBM</p> <p>Tel: 03-2272 4959</p> <p>MAB</p> <p>Tel: 03-2272 2673</p> <p>03-2272 2677</p>
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# MEMORIES OF MY LIFE AS A BLIND PERSON



***Editor's Note: I met Yong Chwan Fwu in early 2006 when NCBM organised a forum of concerned blind individuals in Sarawak. I found that he had some interesting things to say about the work for the blind in Sarawak and invited him to contribute an article for "The NCBM Outreach".***

***Yong Chwan Fwu was one of the first blind persons to study at the first school for the blind in Sarawak. Later on, he obtained a scholarship loan from the Sarawak Foundation to pursue his degree at Universiti Malaya in the 1990s. He graduated with an upper second-class degree and was rewarded with the conversion of his loan scholarship to a full sponsorship. He took up teacher training in 1999 and is now teaching at the Batu Lintang Secondary School for the Blind in Kuching, Sarawak.***

***In the following article, Yong shares with us his personal experiences as a blind person and provides some interesting insights concerning the work for the blind in Sarawak.***

I was born in Sarikei in the Sixth Division of Sarawak and it was

in 1980 when I was located by a social worker at the Sibul General Hospital. I was then brought to the primary school for the blind at Jalan Ong Tiang Swee in Kuching, Sarawak. There I studied for five years from 1980 to 1984, having skipped one year in standard two.

In 1980, the school had only three classes – standards one to three. The principal was Augustin Lee and the only two teachers there were Siau Ging Lock and Gunggu Lega. When I was in standard three in 1981, the upper primary classes were also introduced to the school. Gunggu specialised in the teaching of mathematics and science subjects while Siau taught all the other subjects and sometimes the principal would chip in to teach certain subjects. The two teachers were totally blind but they were very good teachers indeed.

I remember enjoying the maths and science classes conducted by Gunggu. When I was in standard three, Siau had to manage to classes at one go – standards three and six. First he would work with us in standard three and assign some tasks for us to do so that he could then turn his attention to the pupils of standard six who shared the same classroom with us. There were only about 20 students in the whole school and only three to five students in each class. So we were able to get the full attention of the teachers and the principal.

Indeed, it was a great loss to the school when Siau Ging

Lock decided to leave and take up telephone operating as his permanent job. He had been a temporary teacher from the beginning and his teaching post could not be confirmed in the 1980s when the government adopted the policy of closing the doors of teacher training to all blind persons in the country; at this time, the Minister of Education was En. Sulaiman Daud. Subsequently, with the repeated requests made by NCBM, the policy of opening the doors to teacher training for qualified blind persons was introduced in 1998; At this time, the Minister of Education was En. Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak.

Fortunately, we still had Gunggu who had been accepted as a permanent teacher earlier on. One day in the early 1990s, Gunggu had received news that there were three blind children living in the same family living in Kampong Ulu Bakong, Sri Aman. So with the help of his brother, both of them paddled in a sampan to the village and persuaded the family to send all the three blind children to the school at Jalan Ong Tiang Swee. The youngest of the three children, Bibi Hajjah bt. Bukhari, is now in form five; the sister, Fazwah bt. Bukhari, has completed her form five and is waiting for admission to the Gurney Training Centre; the eldest of the three had died due to illness while still in primary education. Gunggu is still teaching at the school which is now located in Batu Lintang, Kuching.

Of the five students in the 1981 standard six class (our seniors), four of them have obtained employment and one of them is a housewife. All three of the students in the 1981 standard one class (our juniors) have also found employment.

Sa Senambong was my class-mate when we were in standard four. He had been discovered in Sri Aman (now known as Bahagian Betong) by Datin Ampian, wife of the Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak. Sa studied till form six and was admitted to the GTC in Kuala Lumpur after which he became a telephone operator. He was one of those who applied for teacher training after the introduction of the 1998 policy on blind teachers and he is now teaching in a secondary school integrated programme in Melaka.

One afternoon in 1981 when I was in standard three, we had just come in from a football game and I was full of sweat and dirt. As I was resting on my bed, suddenly I heard Gunggu and Siau calling me and they told me that there were three visitors from the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) in Kuala Lumpur – they were En. Ivan Ho, En. John Kim and En. Godfrey Ooi. I felt so embarrassed because I could not hide my sweat and dirt from their eyes. Later on, Gunggu and Siau told me not to worry because the three visitors were also blind like myself and they had just dropped in for an informal visit. In fact, Siau is now the chairman of the Sarawak branch of SBM and he has been holding this post since 1992.

A person that I remember very

well is Thomas Manggang with his scrambler bike, KD 4480. In a sponsorship project of the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (RCSB) for the Sarawak Society for the Blind in the 1970s, Thomas had been appointed as the after-care officer to look into the needs of the blind for education, vocational training and employment. With his KD 4480, Thomas would go riding from Kuching to Limbang to locate blind people and refer them to the services that they needed. Until 1984 when the project was terminated, Thomas had helped to locate at least 200 blind persons. The project was ended because the community-based programme had been started by the Welfare Department and it was felt that they could deal with the needs of the blind. However, I feel that the RCSB project had been much more effective in meeting the needs of the blind.

Jiti Taeing was one of those blind children who had been located by Thomas Manggang, riding over muddy roads and tracks to the village in Kampong Selampit, Lundu. Jiti joined my class in standard one and we were classmates right up to university level. Both of us were also recruited to be teachers at the Batu Lintang Secondary School. Subsequently, Jiti decided to go back to university and he is now reading for his master's degree in special education at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Were it not for Thomas and because of the RCSB project, I cannot imagine where Jiti would be now. As for me, besides teaching at the Batu Lintang school, I am also serving as the secretary of the Sarawak

Branch Committee of SBM under the chairmanship of Siau Ging Lock. Many projects and activities have been introduced by Siau, including public awareness seminars, training courses in Massage and reflexology, excursions and study visits. Most significantly, he has enabled the Sarawak branch of SBM to secure its own building and to develop its office administration with the employment of a general clerk.

Another important personality in the work for the blind in Sarawak is Robert Tam. He has been the Chairman of the Kuching branch of the Sarawak Society for the Blind since the 1990s. Before he became totally blind, he was the first entrepreneur to introduce and build up the cargo business in Sarawak. As the Kuching branch Chairman, he has made a significant contribution in the upliftment of the Sarawak blind. He brought in trainers from Thailand and China to equip the blind with skills in massage and reflexology and helped the blind to develop their massage enterprises. He even spends some time going to the villages to locate blind persons for referral to relevant services. His latest project is the construction of a proper building (with phase 1 having just been completed) for the Kuching branch of the Sarawak Society for the Blind. Most of all, I admire Mr. Tam's magnanimous nature – he had not held any grudge against me in spite of my many criticisms concerning him during the past years when I was Secretary of the SBM Sarawak branch. In fact, he kindly agreed to be the guarantor for my scholarship loan from the Sarawak Foundation which enabled me to take up my

education at Universiti Malaya.

After my graduation, I was not able to find a suitable job. At that time in the early 1990s, Datuk Lau Hui Kang was the president of the Sarawak Society for the Blind. He heard of my plight and offered me a job as telephone operator in his company. He said he did not know what job to offer me because he did not know what work I could do. However, he knew that in Kuala Lumpur, Ivan Ho had been a very successful telephone operator and was a good leader in the National Council for the Blind.

Meanwhile, I applied for the post of instructor in social skills at the Gurney Training Centre and I was accepted by the GTC. At about the same time, Datuk Lau offered to increase my pay and when he heard that I was leaving his company for the GTC in Kuala Lumpur, he advised me to stay on as he did not think it was such a good idea for me to go so far away.

Of course, I appreciated his kindness and concern but I still decided to leave as I felt that there was very little that I could really do in his company. After teaching at the GTC for more than one year, I was successful in my application for teacher training and joined the programme in 1999. On completion of my teacher training, I was assigned to the Batu Lintang integrated programme for the blind as a resource teacher.

Annie Soon is another important figure in the Sarawak work for the blind whom I will not forget. She was an exemplary principal at the Batu Lintang Primary School for

the Blind for a period of 22 years from the early 1980s until 2005. She was very strict with the blind students and expected them to obey the rules, just like sighted children. At the same time, she could also be very loving and understanding of their needs. Indeed, it was a great loss to our school when she had to leave in 2005 for a higher standard school in order for her promotion to be recognised by the government. I wonder whether it might be possible for the government to consider having another policy whereby capable officials could be promoted in salary scale without transferring them out from those places where they are most needed.

Finally, the recent elections in the Sarawak Society for the Blind has brought in a new president, Datuk Dr. Hsuing, since 2005. I find him to be a president with a very positive outlook and he seems to be very receptive of our ideas as demonstrated at our meeting between NCBM and the Sarawak Welfare Department on Friday, February 17, 2006.

In conclusion, I must say that I am very proud of my former teachers and all those who are working for the welfare of the blind in Sarawak. I want to work with all of them in order to help bring about a better tomorrow for the blind in Sarawak.

The self is not  
something ready-  
made, but something  
in continuous  
formation through  
choice of action.

**John Dewey**

**(1859 - 1952)**

## **AKABOSHI'S MUSIC THERAPY**

Akaboshi is the president of the Tokyo Music Volunteer Association and he is the inspiration for the music therapy known as ryouiku ogaku in 1977. With a donation of RM160,000 from the Japanese embassy, the programme was introduced to fourteen welfare homes all over Malaysia. As a pilot project, the therapy will be taught in one school per state.

Akaboshi's music therapy is designed to help one rehabilitate one's physical condition. Besides learning interaction and coordination with one another, the participants are actually performing respiratory exercises as they sing and move with their hands.

The rehabilitation of major functions is carried out by playing specially designed instruments. In fact, the strength of the programme lies in its easy-to-follow format which can be adapted or adjusted to suit the needs of any group, including the disabled and the elderly.

It may be useful to explore the possibilities of this programme for the benefit of the deaf-blind and other blind persons with additional disabilities.

## **A POINT TO PONDER: ARE OTHERS ALWAYS BETTER OFF?**

When a person is upset, disappointed or facing a failure, he probably thinks, "Why am I so unfortunate? Why can't I achieve my goals? Why ...?"

If the above questions or similar problems are bothering you, then you may join me by reading the following story.

There was a rabbit who had been having a hard time searching for food and often his life in trying to escape from other fierce animals in the jungle. He prayed hard to the Creator to make him into a bird so that he could fly freely in the beautiful sky without any worries of being attacked by other animals on the ground.

One day his wish was granted. He soon became a nice-looking bird; he was able to fly swiftly in the air, just as what he had been longing for. However, there were many bigger birds who were trying to attack him. After searching diligently, he found a suitable place and alighted on the branch of a tree in order to build his nest. Within a few days, he was very sad to find that the nest had been destroyed and his family members had been killed by a fox for his food.

So he asked God to change him into a fish. His answer was granted and he was very happy to be able to swim well in the open sea. However, as he carried on his daily life, he soon realised that he

was not as safe or as comfortable as he had thought. Besides experiencing narrow escapes from the nets of fishermen, he was also frequently chased after by other hungry creatures in the sea.

This time he prayed hard to be changed into a man. "Human beings have no problems," he thought, "because they are the masters over all other creatures."

Well, he got his wish and became a man. He suddenly found that he was faced with a lot of responsibilities and he had to deal with many challenges ahead of him. He felt very unhappy as a human being. Thus, he started begging the Creator to make him into an angel.

Guess what? His wish was not granted by the Almighty Creator. Instead, he was changed back into a rabbit again. He finally had to face up to life and solve his problems as a rabbit.

This story shows us that it is always possible to maximise our own capabilities and to use whatever we possess to change whatever awkward situations that are confronting us into something that is to our own advantage. We do not need to be a bird to fly or a fish to swim.

As someone has said, "It's not what we have; it's what we do with what we have" that matters.

# HUMOROUS TITBITS

Here are some more signs and sign-boards from around the world that tried to communicate with foreign visitors in English. The meanings came out rather different from what the sign-makers intended.

## Message on a leaflet:

IF YOU CANNOT READ, THIS LEAFLET WILL TELL YOU HOW TO GET LESSONS.

## In a Leipzig elevator:

DO NOT ENTER THE LIFT BACKWARDS, AND ONLY WHEN LIT UP.

## In a Yugoslavian hotel:

THE FLATTENING OF UNDERWEAR WITH PLEASURE IS THE JOB OF THE CHAMBERMAID.

## In a Japanese hotel:

YOU ARE INVITED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CHAMBERMAID.

## Outside a Hong Kong tailor shop:

LADIES MAY HAVE A FIT UPSTAIRS.

## In a Bangkok dry cleaner's:

DROP YOUR TROUSERS HERE FOR BEST RESULTS.

## Outside a Paris dress shop:

DRESSES FOR STREET WALKING.

## In a Zurich hotel:

BECAUSE OF THE IMPROPRIETY OF ENTERTAINING GUESTS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX IN THE BEDROOM, IT IS SUGGESTED THAT THE LOBBY BE USED FOR THIS PURPOSE.

## In a Rome laundry:

LADIES, LEAVE YOUR CLOTHES HERE AND SPEND THE AFTERNOON HAVING A GOOD TIME.

## In a Bangkok temple:

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ENTER A WOMAN EVEN A FOREIGNER IF DRESSED AS A MAN.

## In a Tokyo bar:

SPECIAL COCKTAILS FOR THE LADIES WITH NUTS.

(Taken from The Star: Rib-Tickling Notices – English Around the World; 15th October 2001)

IF YOU KNOW  
OF ANY BLIND  
PERSON NEEDING  
REGISTRATION FOR  
EDUCATION OR  
REHABILITATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT US  
IMMEDIATELY

NCBM

Tel: 03-2272 4959

MAB

Tel: 03-2272 2673

03-2272 2677

# **PRINCIPAL OFFICE-BEARERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS OF NCBM FOR 2006 - 2008**

Dato' S. Kulasegaran, President, NCBM

En. Mah Hassan Hj. Omar, Vice-President, NCBM  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Mr. John Wong Siong Cheng, Hon. Secretary, NCBM  
Sarawak Society for the Blind

Prof. Dr. M. Chandra Sekaran, Hon. Treasurer, NCBM  
Malaysian Association for the Blind

Mr. Wong On Fook  
Sabah Society for the Blind

Mr. Samat Lakai  
Sabah Society for the Blind

Ven. Canon Andrew Phang See Yin  
St. Nicholas Home

Mr. Ooi Chee Khoon  
St. Nicholas Home

Puan Maziah Abu Bakar  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun  
Sarawak Society for the Blind

Mr. George Thomas  
Malaysian Association for the Blind

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En. Mah Hassan Hj. Omar, Vice-President  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Mr. John Wong Siong Cheng, Hon. Secretary  
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Mr. George Thomas  
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Puan Maziah Abu Bakar  
Society of the Blind in Malaysia

Mr. Wong On Fook  
Sabah Society for the Blind

Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Mr. Moses Choo Siew Cheong

# **CHAIRPERSONS OF COMMITTEES OF NCBM FOR 2006 - 2008**

Committee on Access to Technology for the Blind  
Dr. Zakaria Osman

Committee on Education and Welfare  
Tuan Haji Ahmad Mohamad Said

Committee on Employment and Related Support Service  
Co-chaired by Mr. Samat Lakai and Mr. Stephen Hsu Wee

Committee on Library and Information Service  
Miss Chok Siew Lee

Committee for the Prevention of Blindness  
Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani

Malaysian Braille Press Management Committee  
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Committee for Sports and Recreation  
Co-chaired by Mr. Patrick Ling and Mr. S. Radha Krishnan

## **REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS 2006 - 2008**

Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR)  
Mr. Godfrey Ooi Goat See

National Council of Welfare and Social Development Malaysia (NCWSDM)  
Ven. Archdeacon Samuel D. John

Standing Committee on Prevention and Control of Blindness  
Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani

World Blind Union  
Dato' S. Kulasegaran and  
Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Auditors 2006 - 2007  
Ernst & Young, Kuala Lumpur.

## **EARN SOME EXTRA CASH**

Readers are invited to write for our publication, "THE NCBM OUTREACH". For articles published, payments are as follows:-

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM75.00
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM75.00
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM35.00 - RM75.00
4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation - RM10.00.

*(Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless these submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.)*

# NOTES

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